Wilton Parish

1726-1800

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WILTON PARISH

1726-1800

A HISTORICAL SKETCH

By

MARIAN OLMSTEAD

WILTON, CONNECTICUT
NINETEEN HUNDRED

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MARIAN OLMSTEAD

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IN LOVING MEMORY

OF

HAWLEY OLMSTEAD, LL. D.

AND OF

EDWARD OLMSTEAD, M. A.

HIS SON

WHO DEVOTED MANY YEARS OF THEIR LIVES TO THE
EDUCATION OF YOUTH IN THEIR NATIVE TOWN

"Long may the ancient meeting-house
Rise from the village green,
And over all the country round
Its belfried tower be seen;
Still may the call to praise and prayer
Be heard each Sunday morn,
And bind in growing faith the past
With ages yet unborn."

—*HOSMER.*

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

WILTON PARISH

1726-1800

IT is the purpose of this narrative to acquaint those who claim their ancestry from the early settlers of this Parish with the good and worthy men and women of a past generation, and tell how well they served their God, their country, and laid firm foundations for the growth and prosperity of this present town, deserving of the reverent respect of their descendants.

> "For never in the hamlet's bound
> Was lack of sturdy manhood found,
> And never failed the kindred good
> Of brave and helpful womanhood."

Norwalk, purchased by Roger Ludlow in 1640, and transferred by him to its early proprietors, extended "between the two rivers, the one called Norwalk, the other Soakatuck, from the sea a day's walk far up in the country," and soon after by the Patrick purchase additional meadows and uplands were added to this new settlement. We refer, for extended detail of this Norwalk Settlement, to the recently published History of Norwalk, so ably and exhaustively written by its gifted historian, Rev. C. M. Selleck.

We wish to commence with the advent of Norwalk's fair daughter, Wilton Parish.

As the sons of these resolute settlers grew into manhood in their Norwalk homes, inheriting,

perhaps, an added spirit of adventure and independence, naturally they desired to strike out for themselves. An encouragement to do so was the law enacted December 15, 1698, that "as soon as they attained the age of twenty-one years, all Town born children shall have a fifty pound right of commonage in ye Town," and "that no female shall have benefit by this act by their being born in ye Town." But very willingly and happily, we trust, these young men entered into agreement to share their newly acquired grants of land with the young maidens who grew up side by side in these early colonial homes. Cannot we imagine the coming of these newly wedded couples to their granted homes in the northern part of the town, chosen by the river side, on the rocky hillside, or in the primeval forests of these unsettled regions? On Indian trail they came, perhaps riding cozily on pillioned steed, in some way carrying the household furnishings of those days, feather beds, spinning wheels, bright pewter ware, stores of wool and flax, and the pioneer tools and settlers farming implements.

Our Norwalk historian tells us that the town was early supplied with carts as well as horses, even more so than most early New England towns. So passing up the town's highway, through the common pasturage land, cautiously avoiding the "wolf pitts beyond," they came into their inheritance and planted their homes. The same rippling rivers, the same rocky glens, the same sunny hillsides were there then, as we see to-day, but deeper were the depths of the forests, where still traversed the friendly Indian, reluctant to leave his native haunts, and there still lurked the wolf, the cata-

mount and other wild beasts, ready to come down with their depredations upon the flocks and herds of the new settler.

In the early records of Norwalk we find the mention of Cranberry Plain, Chestnut Hill, Belden Hill and other localities, which indicates an early acquaintance with those places. And as the settlement of Danbury was made in 1685, and Ridgefield in 1709, roads were necessarily laid out to those places, making travel through the settlement easy.

Let us note some of the families already located here before the organization of the Parish was formed. Three and perhaps four brothers, Daniel, Samuel, James and John Betts, sons of Thomas Betts, the proprietor of Norwalk, with their many sons and daughters, made a worthy start towards the population of the coming town. Very few Wilton families but what are indebted to them for an ancestor or ancestress of sterling worth. There was Jonathan Wood, Senior, the patriarch of that day, who was the first assigned by name to a seat of honor in the first meeting house; Deacon Jonathan Elmer, with a large family, who moved away in 1747; Deacon James Trowbridge and family, who soon also pass out of Parish records; Deacon Benjamin Hickok, active in the church, and also supposed to be the first miller in the community; Richard Bouton, the first clerk of the society, and Matthew St. John, the ancestor of a large and influential family; Jachin Gregory; John, Ralph and David Keeler; Nathan Olmstead, the grandson of Richard Olmstead, the Norwalk proprietor; John Marvin, whose home was near the river, by the first meeting house; John Stuart and John Wescott;

John Dunning and Joseph Burchard sought their wives in Milford, Sarah and Elizabeth Lambert, whose brother, David Lambert, joined them and built, about 1725, the colonial Lambert house, still in a fair state of preservation, and he brought to that house his bride, Lurany Bill, of Lebanon. Stephen Buckingham settled on the eastern ridge of the Parish and it was at first called after him, and he, with Nathaniel Ketchum, Nathaniel Slosson, William Parker, William Drinkwater and Jonathan Sturtevant, moved away into unknown localities. William Belden came here with his wife, Margaret Arms, from the town of Deerfield, Mass., after the dreadful Indian massacre, when their homes were destroyed by the flames and their nearest relatives killed or carried into captivity. He located in the pleasant valley called Pimpawaug, where an ancient house of the early Beldens still remains in good preservation. He was the ancestor of many families of Beldens, Hurlbutts, Coles, Rockwells, Seymours, Taylors and others, faithful to duty, patriotic and influential in past and present generations.

We cannot accurately give all the names of these earliest settlers, but in 1725 the population of this upper part of Norwalk was sufficient to make them desire a separate parish and the mother town of Norwalk, on December 5, 1725, willingly acceded to their request. A petition to the General Assembly, "holden at Hartford, in His Majesty's Colony of Connecticut," signed by thirty-one of the inhabitants, was granted the second day of May, 1726, and "Wilton Parish in the Town of Norwalk" commenced its existence. As the influence of the Lambert family was powerful in the Parish,

AN OLD COLONIAL HOUSE

LAMBERT HOUSE
Built about 1725

the name of Wilton was probably adopted from their ancestor's English home in Wilton, Wiltshire, England.

Now all was stir and excitement in the young Parish. Mr. Philip Betts in his historical notes compiled in 1853, who not only drew upon church and society records for information, but also upon the reminiscences of his grandparents, Elias and Abigail (Burchard) Betts, states "that the first settlers were a hardy, industrious and pious people, and that they were very strict in the observance of the Sabbath and in the performance of the duties of Christianity," also, "that in the year 1726 the first house of worship was built, but not finished till after the installation of Rev. Mr. Sturgeon. Its location was near where the railroad intersects the road that leads from Kent to Belden Hill; near it was a burying ground, through which the railroad passes. When the men were making this road, which was in 1851, they dug up ten skeletons." The records of the society, commencing with the first meeting, June 7, 1726, are still in preservation. But the first church records are missing and commence with the pastorate of Rev. William Gaylord in 1732-33, and it is greatly to be regretted that there are no records of the formation of the church and the early church members. But from these venerable society records we can glean much that is interesting, showing the forethought and labor of those desirous to make the young Parish independent and prosperous. Probably almost every new community in New England had similar experiences. Let us give some of the quaint language and spelling of those ancient days. After choosing Richard Bouton as clerk of the society,

then by a unanimous vote Rev. Robert Sturgeon was given a call "to officiate in the work of the ministry among them, and for his "Incouragement and Support" he is to receive "the Sum of ninety pounds paramount equivelent to good bills of credit pasing courant paid by the coliter annully." Also he is to receive a "full supply of firewood, to be brought to his habitation from time to time as is needed," also he is to have five acres of land as a house "Loot."

At the next meeting, June 14, 1726, thirteen prominent men were chosen as a committee to consult neighboring pastors to "atend and assist in carring on a day of fasting and prayer among'st them, to seek to God for gidence and directions in the afars before them." At the same time Deacon Elmer was chosen to read the Psalms and John St. John "to sett the tune to the Psalm at all times ussull in the publick worship of God." Three men were also chosen to warn the inhabitants of Sd. Society to their respective meetings "when there is need." The next meeting was held the 21st of this month, Mr. Sturgeon accepts the call and Wednesday the 20th of July next is to be the time of the installation. John Taylor and David Lambert "were to provide for and entertain" the ministers and messengers of the neighboring churches who would be present, receiving afterward for "their trobale, three pounds ten shilling." The Norwalk proprietors were also disposed to deal generously with this young Parish. The old pulpit, redolent with the sacred memories of their first minister, Rev. Thomas Hanford, was "a free gift to the inhabitants of ye upper Society," the February previous, and in response to the several requests of

Wilton Parish, "Tenn" acres of land at first, and several more acres were bestowed afterward, "for ye use and improvement of a Dessenting, Presbiterian or Congregational minister thereabouts improved and settled in that work" (see Hall's Norwalk). Upon the most suitable site in this grant of land was built the first parsonage, a house now called the "Gaylord House," still existing, but in a dilapidated condition.

At the society meeting next September, when the fast waning summer days were passing away, it was deemed necessary to make the meeting-house more comfortable "by laying the floor, by plastering the walls and by making comfortable seats to sett in." Oh, ye descendants of those hardy men and women, how would you have enjoyed these long Sunday services in this primitive, fireless place of worship?

Then next came the seating the meeting-house according to "age and list," a task requiring great tact and judgment. Evidently Matthew St. John, Deacon Elmer and John Stuart were supposed to have these qualifications, and were chosen a committee to attend to it, but John Stuart was not willing to take this responsibility and Nathaniel Ketchum was appointed in his place. A historical writer recently says in regard to this custom, "Nowhere and at no time have the tendencies toward aristocracy and aristocratic distinction and regulation declared themselves more clearly than in these simple communities. All through the next century it occupied the attention and energies of the best citizens and sometimes convulsed the social feeling of whole parishes into bitter disputes and bitter legal contests." This seating was not satisfactorily

BELDEN HOUSE

GAYLORD HOUSE

Built for Rev. Mr. Sturgeon, 1726 Presented to Rev. Mr. Gaylord, 1733

arranged until the first part of the next year, 1727, when name and place were adjusted. It is interesting to note on the record what men of age and estate were seated in the great pew, the corner pews, the first, second, third and fourth long seats, but we have not time to note them now. After they were filled up and the younger men seated, then perhaps it was permitted for the quiet mothers, wives and daughters and the children to find their separate places. But it is recorded that Moses Comstock, a man of sterling worth and ample means, who was a liberal giver to the society, should "enjoy with his family the Prevleg of the meeting house at all times of publick worship, he giving unto said society what he shall see cause towards the minister's Salary." Soon after he was invited with his wife to the second front seat. There was much else to look after this busy year. Permission was obtained from the town (Norwalk) to have the "Parish Priveleg of trainin in a military company formed by themselves under such officers as the Major shall see cause to allow them," thus unconsciously preparing themselves for the military discipline needed in the future.

Convenient highways were to be made from the distant points of the settlement to the meeting-house, with "as little charge to Sd. Society as they can" (an injunction thought prudent even in these days). A sign post was to be made of the "poppel tree" near David Lambert's.

David Lambert, living in a central part of the Parish and knowing how to entertain the weary traveler, was appointed "Taverner." A pound was also located near David Lambert's and Joseph Burchard's for the use of the society, and if

not kept according to law and order the people of Pimpawaug should have the same privilege. Then came on the serious undertaking of bridge building, which was as necessary then as now, especially when the spring freshets came on and the melting cakes of ice rushed down the overflowing rivers. One was first built near the meeting-house, and soon after we read of a horse bridge near John Marvin's, then one in Pimpawaug near Captain St. John's, and one near Eliakin Elmer's, on the Ridgefield road. The importance of schools for the rising generation was also soon felt. Sergeant Joseph Burchard, Lieutenant Ketchum and Ensign St. John were made the first school committee, and Rev. Mr. Sturgeon was the first school teacher; he was "to receive the county money as far as it would go, and the scholars which shall go to school from time to time shall pay the rest which they shall agree with him for." But this arrangement did not last long. The next year the Parish was divided into three districts, "Kent, including Chestnut Hill, Belden's Hill and Pimpawaug. The school was to be kept on Belden's Hill in June and July, Pimpawaug in August and September and Kent and Chestnut Hill as long as the money holds out," each district to receive one-third part colony money.

Joseph Peck was allowed to settle as "Black Smithe in the Parish if he shall se caus," and, to add to the revenue of the society, it was agreed "to keep a flock if the town would permit." So now this Parish enters quietly into the comfort of having all its needs, spiritual and temporal, attended to. To be sure, the annually appointed collectors do not have an easy time in obtaining the minister's and society's "rates" any more than modern tax

collectors, and the uncertainty of who shall bring the minister's wood and how much he needs is a frequent question in the society meetings. But human nature was the same then as now. However, Wilton Parish as early as 1758 did not make it obligatory for those who connected themselves with other sects to pay this minister's rate. Baptists and Methodists were excused, provided they had certificates of membership from their church officers, and those Episcopalians attending St. Paul's Church in Norwalk had a special collector appointed to carry their rates to the rector there.

Now in all this apparent peace a rift of discord creeps in. Rev. Mr. Sturgeon, who was of Scotch-Irish origin, has not yet brought his wife and children to this country with him, and the people desire him "to apply to the Presbetry to use all proper means to induce his wife to come over into New England," and if he did so they would "sett down esse and contently." Rev. Mr. S. G. Willard states in his admirable anniversary address in 1876 that tradition says that on the day of their arrival Mr. Sturgeon preached upon the words "We have seen strange things to-day." But the uneasiness in the Parish continues. Mr. Sturgeon's "life and conversation do not give satisfaction." It was voted December 29, 1731, to call a council to dismiss him. We have not found the date of the dismission, but at a Parish meeting April 11, 1733, measures were adopted to obtain another minister.

A candidate for the ministry is soon found by consulting the neighboring ministers, William Gaylord, born in West Hartford in 1709, a graduate of Yale college in 1730, and who has just completed his theological studies. He seems to have

occupied the pulpit several Sundays and to have pleased the people, for on May 29, 1732, he is approached to know "if he would tarry some considerable time, and upon what consideration." Mr. Gaylord was of good colonial ancestry, being descended from Deacon William Gaylord, who came from England to Dorchester, Mass., in 1631, and on his maternal side from Rev. Samuel Stone, second minister of Hartford.

Having been, perhaps, too hasty in the settlement of the first minister, this young man was put on quite a probation before it was decided to give him a call and a salary acceptable to him. A settlement of two hundred pounds, including the house and land purchased from Mr. Sturgeon, valued at one hundred and sixty pounds, and a yearly salary of sixty-five pounds was at last arranged satisfactorily with the cautious proviso "that it is to be understood that if Mr. Gaylord turn from ye opinion or principals that he now professes contrary to ye mind of ye Society then he is to return ye two hundred pounds again." A council was called from the neighboring churches to ordain this young man on February 13, 1733. The very thorough examination of the candidate well satisfied the council and he was ordained the next day, the 14th. Fortunately the church records are preserved from this date, kept in the neat, accurate handwriting of Rev. Mr. Gaylord. We learn that Rev. Thomas Hawley, the first minister of Ridgefield, was the Moderator of that Council, Rev. Samuel Cook of Stratford was Scribe; Rev. Moses Dickinson, recently settled in Norwalk, was also present. We are also indebted to Mr. Gaylord for a list of families in this Parish as far as he had

knowledge of, at the time of his settlement, the members of the church also, and of those who came in by half-way covenant and full membership during his ministry; a record of marriages, the fees ranging from eighteen pence to forty shillings; a record of baptisms, over nine hundred, mostly of infants, and a list of deaths in the Parish. These ancient, time-worn records are a mine of treasure-trove to the eager genealogist of these present days.

The quaint and often pathetic language of this pastor in these old annals reveals not only his sympathetic interest in his people, but his own personal family history. He married Elizabeth, youngest daughter of the Rev. John Davenport, of Stamford, three weeks before his ordination. Fourteen years afterward she died, July 6, 1747, leaving six children, and we cannot refrain from copying part of his touching tribute to her memory: "Died, my own Dear wife, Elizabeth, after above twelve months' indisposition and about fifteen weeks' confinement to the house, age 38 years 10 months and eight days. I took her in marriage January 29, 1732-33. I have had by her seven children, six of which are alive. A good God hath made her a good wife to me, both in spirituals and temporals; prudent, faithful, loving, loyal and very respectful, and I have reason to hope ye God of all grace made her a good Christian. Her death is a sore loss to me and my dear children, but I trust in God, who in great wisdom has ordered it."

Soon after he records the death of two young daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah, "dying of a sore Grevious consumptive illness." Then again the sorrowing father records the death of his son, Moses, who had "been from home in ye expidition ag'st

Montreal a little more than four month, at Fort Herkimer, October, 1760, 21 years of age, wanting about two months." About this time his son, Diodate, was born, who inherited this old parsonage, the grandfather of Rev. John Gaylord Davenport, of Waterbury, who has happily inherited a possession more valuable than the old manse, the qualities of mind and heart of this early pastor.

Rev. Mr. Gaylord's whole pastorate of harmonious and faithful service for thirty-five years ended with his death, January 2, 1767, aged 58 years, and his grave is by the side of many of his parishioners in the old Sharp Hill burial-yard. The inscription on his gravestone, supposed to have been written by his successor, Rev. Isaac Lewis, expresses truthfully his character. "He was an able Divine, a faithful minister and a meek and humble Christian. His love for souls was very great, in proof of which he spent his life in unwearied endeavors for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. And among many other excellancies he eminently merited the character of a peace-maker and is now undoubtedly reaping ye reward of such in the kingdom of his Lord."

Many important families came into the Parish to dwell just before, or during, the pastorate of Rev. Mr. Gaylord. We find on the society and church records names that are familar in these days and some that we now have no trace of. Abbott, Pachen, Gilbert, Green, Jackson, Fitch, Mead, Cole, Fountain, Sloan, Hurlbutt, Rockwell, DeForest, Raymond, Bennet, Platt, Scribner, Nash, Grumman, Nathan Comstock, Matthew Marvin, Matthew Gregory, Nathan Hubbell,

Michael Middlebrook and others. Of these we can only mention in detail but a few. Deacon Nathan Comstock, coming from Norwalk in 1738, settled in the wooded depths of the northwest part of the Parish, on the borders of New York state, and brought there his bride, Bethia, daughter of Benajah Strong, of Fairfield. The influence of this family has been a far-reaching one in the Parish and outside its limits. The sons, Major Samuel Comstock, of Revolution distinction, and Benajah Strong Comstock, resided all their lives in this Parish. The last remained in the home of his father and had a daughter, Susan, whose memory is honored as being one of the first missionaries sent out by the American Board to the Osage Indians.

Matthew Marvin, the first, of Wilton, coming by Indian trail from Norwalk, selected his home site in the Pimpawaug valley under the shadow of a wooded hill and looking upon the rippling river. His name is found upon the records as early as 1730, and with his wife, Elizabeth, as church members 1733, and his death at forty-one years of age, in 1744. His son, Matthew, a Revolutionary soldier, his grandson, Matthew Marvin, Esquire, his great grandson, Honorable Charles Marvin, the last two deacons in the church, resided on the same home site and exerted in their day and generation a powerful influence in promoting the prosperity of Church, Parish and Town.

Deacon Matthew Gregory was supposed to have owned quite a tract of land, mostly in Belden Hill District, as early as 1718, but his name is not found on society records until 1737. With his wife, Hannah, he comes into the church by letter in

1740, from the Norwalk church. He built homes for his sons, Ensign, Matthew and Ezra, in which his descendants have been born, both men and women, of strong character and marked ability, a power for good in this community and far beyond its limits.

From the first Nathan Hubbell, who came here from Greenfield, in Fairfield, about 1747, and settled in the southern part of Pimpawaug valley, came another important addition to the life and strength of the Parish, doing good service for town and country in the Revolution army, as deacons in the church, educated men active in the ministry and other professions.

Michael Middlebrook, coming from Fairfield about 1756, was the ancestor of a long line of descendants prominent and very helpful in the religious, secular and social life of Parish and Town. His sons, Samuel and Deacon Jonathan, gave liberally to a fund for the use of the society which has been a very great help to its self-support. Deacon Jonathan also gave the society the land for a burial-yard which is now called "Hill Side Cemetery" and land for the site for a parsonage. Summers, another son, was also a man of position in the Parish, whose descendants have been and are still influential in this community and elsewhere.

In the early part of Rev. Mr. Gaylord's ministry the original little meeting-house became unsuitable for the growing Parish. At a society meeting, held December 25, 1736, the site for a new meeting-house, the proper timber to build it, the way it should be placed, were under discussion. David Keeler, Daniel Betts and Matthew Marvin were chosen a committee to superintend the building of

this new meeting-house, "to be built on ye Sharp Hill, with ye fore or broad side directly to the South," to be built "48 foot in length, 36 foot in breadth and 22 foot post." On June 6, 1739, the old meeting-house was sold "att a vandue at sun one hour high at night," and the money received for it was appropriated toward finishing the new one. The form or model of this house was copied from "ye prime antient" meeting-house of Norwalk. This Norwalk place of worship was probably the third one built there, and burned with many other buildings by the British in 1779. We think the New England meeting-houses of those colonial times had a pyramidal roof; probably in this Wilton building no belfry surmounted the apex. Beside the principal south door was a west door. Within, the pulpit was on the north side. The pews in the body of the house were six feet square. The pew next to the pulpit stairs was the seat of honor for the deacons and men of age and position. The galleries were finished by Jacob Patchen in 1747, with "good white wood and white oake boards" and the seats and pews therein named and designated. We also learn that for the growing family of Rev. Mr. Gaylord, "a place on the east side of the grate aley, the two hind seats as far as is convenient to build a pew," is to be reserved for their use. Before this meeting-house was completed it had the distinction of having Mr. George Whitfield preach in it, while jouneying from New Haven to New York. Instead of seemingly making any trouble for Mr. Gaylord in the disapprobation of his more conservative ministerial brethen, the result was that an unusual number were added to church membership the next year. Another building was

erected near the meeting-house, which cost thirty pounds, for a society and schoolhouse combined This was the Sabba' Day House, of olden times, a place of great comfort to those church-going ancestors of ours living at a distance from the sanctuary. Between the long services, forenoon and afternoon, how much comfort could be taken, especially in winter by the fireplace filled with burning logs, and where it was customary to fill the foot-stove with coals covered with ashes, indispensable to keep the body warm in the fireless meeting-house. There a luncheon of the most suitable viands of Saturday's baking was taken by each family; very likely a refreshing draught of cider was not considered at all improper. There the children could move around in relief from the strict decorum expected in the religious services; the mothers exchange confidences concerning domestic matters and the weekday social events; the fathers, after the discussion of the sermon, could compare their farming prospects, the state of the market in Norwalk and the last news of the French and Indian aggressions, which at that time were a menace to the colonies. This building was probably not necessary after a time, for it was sold in 1774. We have one more item to add to the history of this time. The Sharp Hill burial-yard in December, 1755, was purchased from Richard Dunning for ten pounds. Some of the remaining headstones in this old yard date earlier and were probably taken from the first unmarked burial-yard. In this quiet, neglected spot rest many of the ancestors of the present generation of Wilton-born men and women. "Nature has marched in

according to her lavishness and adorned what we ignored."

The year after Mr. Gaylord's death, the church and society were so suited with Rev. Samuel Mills that they made several overtures to him to become their pastor, which he did not accept. Rev. Isaac Lewis was invited, May, 1768, to supply the pulpit on "probation." He was born in that part of Stratford now called Huntington, January 21, 1746, and was a graduate of Yale College in 1765. A definite call was given him August 9 of the same year, and a one hundred and fifty pound settlement was offered him and seventy pounds as the first year's salary. This salary was afterward increased to one hundred pounds yearly. Lieutanant Nehemiah Mead, Nathan Stuart and Ezra Gregory were appointed a committee to represent the society at the Council called to ordain him on October 26, 1768. At that Council Rev. Mr. Ingersoll of Ridgefield was Moderator, Rev. Mr. Pomroy of Greenfield Scribe and Rev. Moses Dickinson and Samuel Fitch, Esq., represented the Norwalk church. In December, 1768, Mr. Lewis married Miss Hannah Beale of New Preston, and they occupied an old colonial house, which, torn down many years ago, was near the present house of Henry Chichester, Esq. In that home were born eight of their children, the most distinguished of them in after life were the twin sons, Zacheriah and Isaac. The pastorate of Rev. Isaac Lewis was far from being a quiet and peaceful one. The uneasy feeling of the Colonies toward the Mother Country in the first few years of it presaged the coming Revolution. When active hostilities commenced he, and many of his parishioners, were in

MARVIN HOUSE

FITCH HOUSE

the army. Then the fluctuating state of the currency produced by the war made it very difficult for the society to meet its obligations. In 1777 his salary was to be paid half way in produce. To many it may be interesting to know the market value of farm products in those times. "Wheat, four shilling-sixpence a bushel. Rye, three shilling. Corn, two shilling six-pence. Oats, one shilling sixpence. Pork, twenty five shilling per hundred, Beef, twenty shilling. Sheeps-wool, two shilling per pound. Flax, nine pence per pound. Leather shoes, six shilling a pair. Scydar, six shilling a barrel." The next year the salary continued the same, but the prices had increased greatly, owing to the demand for supplies for the Continental Army. Finally, to relieve the pastor in his struggle to obtain a definite support from his people, it was agreed to pay him his promised salary in gold or silver currency. Then the half-way covenant, which the ministers in New England generally disapproved of and which Rev. Mr. Lewis desired to abolish, made an agitation in the church and brought him into disfavor with those who wished to retain it. Rev. Mr. Lewis seeks a dismission, although his people wish to retain him. A Council is called to settle difficulties, but naturally Rev. Mr. Lewis prefers to leave, and is dismissed June 1, 1786, and in the October following is installed pastor of the second church in Greenwich. We can judge of his ability and worth when we learn he remained there in the pastorate for thirty-two years, until he was dismissed at his own request, and at the same time his son, Rev. Isaac Lewis, Jr., was ordained to succeed him. He died in Greenwich, August 27, 1840, aged ninety-four years.

Another agitation during Rev. Mr. Lewis' ministry was the effort to have a new meeting-house. The Sharp Hill building became greatly out of repair and the location was much below the center of the population. But for many years there was much disagreement what was best to do. The subject was started for discussion in society meeting in 1773 and no positive decision was agreed upon until 1789. At first the vote was not to repair, and not to build, then not to build "on the plain west side of Danbury river, and not to build on the east side of S'd River near ye Dwelling House of Clapp Raymond," now in possession of R. H. Fitch. Finally, after consulting a committee of three men of position in adjacent towns, it was voted to place the new meeting-house "on the Hill at the South Easterly part of Daniel Gregory's woodland, near the meadow of Clapp Raymond, Esq., about forty-five rods South Easterly from Sd. stake, Northerly of the Road leading from the Dwelling house of Sd. Raymond to the Dwelling House of Mr. Samuel Middlebrook." Dimensions, "54 in length, 40 feet breadth, 21 feet in height or 21 feet posts," which was afterward changed to "24 feet posts" and "upon the construction of Norwalk meeting-house," which was then upon the up-town green. It was voted not to build a steeple unless "any man or men would build it at their own expense." Somehow it was built, but there is no record of obtaining a bell before 1801. Fortunately for good taste, the vote to paint the building "with yellow ochre, and the roof Spanish brown," was changed and it was painted white. To the energy and self-denial of the men of those years we are indebted for this, our present, church build-

ing, the exterior of which has been slightly altered since its erection, more than a hundred and ten years ago. It was furnished at first with the pulpit and seats taken from the old house and the foundation stones of the old building were used to build the fence of the old burial-yard. From 1767 to 1800 the names of many more important families of Wilton first appear on the records, but this does not accurately prove the time of their settlement. We find the names of Benedict, Hoyt, Scott, Tuttle, Holmes, Sterling, Knapp, Church, Cannon, Chichester, Jessup, Chapman, Patrick, Denton, Davenport, Sturges, Morgan and others.

In reviewing the history of Wilton Parish in the war of the Revolution, surely in these days of patriotic zeal in looking up such annals, no apology is needed if the retrospect is somewhat prolonged. Men who enlisted from Wilton Parish are mostly found accredited to Norwalk, but when we find their names on our church and society records, their marriages, the births and baptisms of their children, the dates of deaths until the town organization, the gravestones marking their burial-places in the several cemeteries, and their military record on the pages of that recognized authority, "Connecticut Men in the Revolution," published in 1889, then we reverently and proudly claim them, and would gladly make their descendants better acquainted with their inheritance of heroic deeds for the freedom of the country. We cannot speak of each soldier, and while gratitude and honor belong to each one, private as well as those of rank, then, as well as now, who serve their country in defense of right, we can only glance at a few of most distinction. Over one hundred went

out from this Parish into the army. Thirty-five graves still have a headstone to mark their burial-places, time and neglect prevent other graves from being identified, and many after the war was over found home and a burial in other parts of the country.

Let us first note down that Rev. Isaac Lewis, like many a pastor of that time, did not hesitate to leave his people if he could do service for his country. In 1776 he was chaplain in Colonel Philip Bradley's battalion, stationed at Bergen Heights (now Jersey City) and Paulus Hook, but after a severe fever he was obliged to retire. When the British were about to land at Norwalk in 1779 he went with a company to the defense of the coast and a cannon ball struck within three feet of him (from Rev. S. G. Willard's historical address). His name is found on the pension list from Fairfield County in 1832.

Major Samuel Comstock served with distinction throughout the war. Extracts from the obituary published in the Norwalk Gazette soon after his death, December 1, 1824, will give a just estimate of his character.*

"He entered in his military career at seventeen during the war with France. In this school he, with many a hero of the Revolution, took his first lessons in the military art, and became qualified to render his Country more eminent services in that eventful conflict which enrolled her among the nations and filled the world with her fame. At the commencement of the war of Independance he had command of a company of militia. In the Autumn of '76 he received orders to march to New

* Written by Hawley Olmstead, LL. D.

York, where his company was soon reduced by an epidemic from one hundred to eight effective men. His capacity for command having attracted the notice of his superiors, he was honored with a Captain's commission in the regular forces, and having enlisted a company of volunteers he joined the Army and was attached through the war to the division of the Commander in Chief. The hardships and privations he endured, the sacrifices he made, and the dangers he encountered, nobly exhibited the gallantry of his spirit and his devotion to the cause. He shrunk from no alloted service, however difficult or dangerous. His toils and dangers ended not until the events at Yorktown closed the struggle, and decided forever the question of American freedom. In the last season of the drama of the Revolution he had the honor of being an Actor. Soon after he was promoted to the rank of Major." Major Comstock was a valuable citizen of his native town, being sent to legislature many years. He was also active in church and society, being clerk and treasurer of the society from 1788 to 1810. He married Mercy, daughter of Theophilous Mead, December 26, 1765, who died eight years before his death. Major Comstock was on the original Cincinnati list.

From the colonial home of Ezra Gregory on Belden Hill went forth to the call for arms four sons, while the fifth, desiring to go, was too young to be accepted. Ezra Gregory, the father, had charge of military stores until his death in 1776. Captain Abraham, the oldest son, was in service as Captain in the Light House under Colonel Silliman of Fairfield from 1776 to 1783. Ezra and Moses were in service a shorter time, while

GREGORY HOUSE
Built 1740

Lieutenant Matthew served from 1777 to 1783 as Sergeant, Ensign and Lieutenant, with Major Comstock, and his name is also found on the Cincinnati list. His home afterward was in Albany, N. Y., where he died June 4, 1848, in his ninety-first year.

Another Wilton family contributed largely of their young men to the cause. From the Hubbells, of Pimpawaug Valley, went Salmon, Seth, Zadock, Thaddeus, brothers, and their cousin, Captain Nathan Hubbell. Lieutenant Salmon Hubbell enlisted in the Continental Army July 6, 1775, received the commission of Lieutenant in 1779, and served until the army was disbanded, and he was also on the Cincinnati list. He died in Bridgeport, March 11, 1830. Among others who served with distinction we would mention the names of Captain Daniel Betts, Ensign Isaiah Betts, Captain Azor Belden, Captain Nathan Gilbert, Lieutenant Daniel Hurlbutt, Quartermaster Thaddeus Sterling, Lieutenant Samuel De Forest, Ensign Aaron Keeler, the last two being on the Cincinnati list. We find our Wilton men responding to the call to arms in 1775, in the defense of New York in 1776, where deadly disease did more havoc than the British bullet, and the same year at the battle of White Plains. Some were taken prisoners at the fall of Fort Washington, some were guarding military stores at Fishkill in 1777, some were in the raid at Danbury, and the battle of Ridgefield the same year, some in Washington's main army in the battles in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, spending the winter of suffering and extremity at Valley Forge, some at the storming of Stony Point in 1779 and at the surrender of York-

town, and so on until peace was declared and the army disbanded by Washington, June, 1783.

Now our thoughts turn to the women of this Parish in their homes on hillside and in valley—how did they feel in these exciting years? What loneliness and anxieties, what self-denials and great burdens must have shadowed their lives day and night. Probably the dressing in homespun and linsey-woolsey, the giving up the imported drink of tea, and of the pretty fine fabrics that woman's taste prefers, was but a little sacrifice to them. But to miss the strong arm of husband, the vigorous help of the stalwart sons, with the wearing fear that they might never return, with the burden of farm work, perhaps depending upon the farm products for their daily support, the training of the usually large family of young children, the spinning and weaving, how did their souls and bodies endure the strain? One brave woman, Mary Cole, it is said, when she heard her husband was sick or wounded at White Plains, had the courage to ride over to bring him home on the same steed, which long ride had not only the danger of meeting the British soldiery, but the roving ruffianly bands of cowboys on the border line of the state. She was living in Wilton in 1840 a pensioner.

Wilton Parish, as well as Norwalk, had the reputation of having many Tory sympathizers residing within their limits. While in these days much allowance is made for those who then conscientiously remained loyal to King George and the established church of England, we can realize what very detestable neighbors they must have been, when they carried secret information to the enemy, involving loss of life, property and defeat of the

patriots, and leading Tryon's forces into their native towns to their destruction. Sometimes the suspected Tory was himself put in jeopardy. One prominent Wilton man was imprisoned on suspicion, a guard of his own townsmen put over him and his young cattle taken to sustain the needy army. For protection, he obtained a safe conduct from the American Colonel to enable him to return safely to his home. It was a common belief that the leaden statue of King George the Third in Bowling Green, N. Y., broken down by the "Sons of Liberty," was taken to Litchfield, Conn., to be melted into bullets to greet the soldiers of King George. But in some mysterious way, parts of it were taken secretly and buried in the soil of Wilton to be preserved, and in the peaceful years long after, the spade and the plow brought them into the light. Besides some small fragments found in the cellar of an old Tory house when it was torn down, in the garden close by, and in making a ditch near the Episcopal church, about four hundred and twenty-five pounds were found.

After the battle of Ridgefield was fought, the British army in their retreat to their shipping at Compo, Westport, passed through Wilton, terrifying the inhabitants in their homes by their insolence and arbitrary demands. A paper written by one of the Lamberts gives probably a correct statement of their march: "The British in their retreat from Danbury back to Compo encamped in the lower part of the town of Ridgefield on the night of 27th and 28th of April, 1777, from thence in the morning they proceeded to Wilton, crossed from the Ridgefield road, where the Congregational church now stands, to the Danbury road, about

DAVENPORT HOUSE

BIRTHPLACE OF MOSES STUART, D.D.

one-half mile north of St. Matthew's Church, and here they halted, where they took breakfast and then resumed their march, at about 9 o'clock in the forenoon. Near this place where they had halted for breakfast some of them entered Mr. Belden's store, in which was deposited a quantity of merchandise belonging to a gentleman from New York, which they began to destroy, but on being informed by Mr. Belden that the merchandise was private property, they desisted from doing any further harm to the same. At the next neighbor's barn they found Continental stores, which they set on fire, and proceeded immediately on their march to the main army. But very soon after they left the barn Mrs. Belden with her sister, Miss Lampson, went thither and extinguished the fire. The flank guard then on passing through a field near by found a number of hogsheads of rum belonging to the Continental army, which they destroyed with all possible dispatch. Here the British were fired upon by some militia and one British soldier was wounded. On their march thence in passing through the eastern part of Wilton they fired upon the Americans and wounded three men." The former house of the Chapmans and Dudleys, situated on a secluded road off the main road to Westport, was used as a storehouse for valuable goods by neighboring families, considering it to be a safe hiding-place. Some of the straggling British soldiers must have received some inkling of it, for it was broken open and thoroughly rummaged, and much of the contents either taken away or destroyed.

When Norwalk was invaded and burned in 1779 by order of Tryon, many of the panic-stricken

inhabitants, with all the household goods they could take with them, sought refuge with their relatives and friends in the Parish of Wilton, which then was unmolested by the enemy.

To return to the closing years of our Parish history: After the agitation of the Revolutionary period, and the dismission of Rev. Isaac Lewis, it was eight years before a settled pastor was obtained. Several were called, but did not accept the position. During that period, at a society meeting the 10th of June, 1792, Major Samuel Comstock, Blackleach Jessup, Deacon Daniel Gregory, Capt. Nathan Gilbert and Abijah Betts were appointed a committee "to adjust and settle the Districts for the several schools in the Society of Wilton," the bounds of which remain the same at the present time, and it is interesting to note, showing the change in public opinion at the present day, that on December 31, 1792, it was voted that the society's committee "shall purchase five tickets in the Newfield Lottery for the benefit of the Society."

In November, 1793, a call was given Rev. Aaron Woodward, "a yearly salary of one hundred pounds, twenty cords of wood," and "the interest of one hundred and fifty pounds until a parsonage is purchased," and "he was not to be requested to preach his sentiments!" The call was accepted, and Mr. Woodward was ordained January 7, 1794. The ordination sermon was preached by Rev. Benjamin Trumbull, of North Haven, whose daughter, Martha, became Mr. Woodward's wife two weeks after his ordination.

Mr. Woodward was born at North Coventry, Conn., October 14, 1760; graduated at Yale, 1789.

For a time he resided in a part of Nathan Davenport's house, now in possession of his son, James Davenport, and it is said that in the location of the parsonage built across the street Mr. Woodward wished to have the building set at a distance from the road, as in the early morning his slumbers were much disturbed by the noise of the teamsters on their way to Norwalk. His health becoming much impaired, he resigned his charge in 1801, retired from the ministry and removed to a farm in Wilbraham, Mass., where he resided until his death, February 15, 1840.

In bringing this history to a close, two men born in Wilton Parish before 1800 deserve a special mention from their eminently useful lives, reflecting distinction upon the place of their birth.

Moses Stuart, the son of Isaac and Olive (Morehouse) Stuart, was born March 26, 1780. His father was a farmer, and the house, with its ancient chimney, still remains on the brow of Drum Hill. Modern taste and improvements have changed the house greatly, and with the well-kept grounds adjoining, in the hands of its present owners, it is a most attractive spot. "Did Dame Nature take this child upon her knee and whisper" to him the higher life beyond his cradle home, or was it the parents' loving training, the sisters' devotion, that made this precocious boy "read books with eagerness when only four years old," and at fourteen desire to leave the farmer life of his ancestors for the higher and broader life of a scholar? We learn that he was prepared for the sophomore class of Yale College under the instruction of Roger M. Sherman of Norwalk; that he graduated from Yale with the highest honors in 1799, and that after

HAWLEY OLMSTEAD, LL. D.

studying law he was tutor in the college from 1802 to 1804. Then the "Divine call" came to him to enter the ministry. He was the pastor of the Center Church, New Haven, from March, 1806, to January, 1810. Andover Seminary then persuaded him to take the professorship in Greek and Hebrew in that institution, where he remained until his death, January 4, 1852. His intellectual abilities, the great influence he exerted over the hearts and lives of the young men studying for the ministry, the power of his consistent Christian character, gained him great distinction, the memory of which still lingers in his native town, as well as in the hearts of his gifted descendants.

Hawley Olmstead was born December 17, 1793, on Olmstead Hill, where his Olmstead ancestors were the first settlers, and where his father, Aaron Olmstead, was a farmer. His mother, Sarah Esther Hawley, was the daughter of Ezekiel Hawley, a Revolutionary soldier, who died in the service in 1776, and her great grandfather, Rev. Thomas Hawley, was the first minister of Ridgefield. At an early age, feeling a great desire for a liberal education, he left the farm, and at fourteen years of age taught a district school successfully for three years in the neighborhood. Then, undaunted by the difficulties in his way and encouraged by the sympathy and counsel of his valued friend, Major Samuel Comstock, he prepared for Yale College at the Academy at Greenfield Hill, under the instruction of Rev. William Belden (himself a native of Wilton), as an assistant pupil. He entered as sophomore, graduating in the class of 1816. Poor health and weak eyes, brought on by a severe attack of measles, hampered him much in his college

course. To keep up in the required course of study he memorized much of the exercises from having them read to him, by the kindness of classmates, and with these hindrances he graduated with a high standing. After his graduation, "unable from the state of his eyes to study a profession, he was fully persuaded that he was called, in the providence of God, to the instruction of youth." Returning to his native town, he opened the Wilton Academy soon after his graduation. His marriage to Miss Harriet Smith, of New Canaan, took place April 30, 1818, and the establishment of his hospitable home in the former parsonage, purchased of Rev. Mr. Haight. He taught this Wilton Academy seventeen and a half years, with an interval of three years' teaching in Norwalk.

Then he removed to New Haven in 1839, to take charge of Hopkins Grammar School. What this devoted and competent teacher's influence was over the lives of his many scholars from all over the country, most of whom have passed with him to the world beyond, no estimate could be given. The love and respect of his scholars, the testimony given to his kindness, courtesy and learning have ever been a fitting and permanent memorial to his labors. Wilton owes to him a lasting debt of gratitude for his elevating influence in the cause of education, shown forth even to this day here and also in Norwalk in the cultivation of mind and uprightness of purpose in the men and women he instructed. Mr. Olmstead was also active as a citizen of his native town, representing it in legislature several years, "where his report as chairman of a select committee on common schools in 1826 was readopted in 1828 by the joint committee

on common schools, and its principles and suggestions now form the fundamental provisions of the Common School law." His sound advice was much sought and relied upon by his townsmen, and in the last years of his life, when he made his occasional visits to Wilton, it would be difficult to know who enjoyed them most, those who deemed them like a benediction, or his pleasure in meeting friends for whom he felt such a strong attachment. After he had resigned the cares of his profession, he found much "pleasure and profit as a member of the Circle of retired Ministers and Laymen," in New Haven, and death came suddenly to him December 3, 1868, when he was addressing the "Circle" in his own home upon one of the momentous questions of that day.

Rev. Samuel G. Willard, a dear friend and former pupil, states that in anticipation of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Wilton church in 1876, he gave him this sentiment, "which will be recognized as characteristic of the man and is fit to be engraven as his epitaph: 'Unswerving, supreme fidelity to Truth and Right!'" Let us take this also as the closing tribute to the memory of all the good men and women of the past history, as the foundation stone of their character.

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